PUBLIC INFORMATION

Quick Look:

This document includes:

Background Information,
Quick Facts, Frequently
Asked Questions and
Additional Resources about
House Bill 7085 sponsored by
Rep. Fresen, the Education
Committee and the K-20
Competitiveness
Subcommittee.

Quick Facts:

157,071: Number of children enrolled in the Voluntary Prekindergarten program during the 2010-11 program year.

\$404 million: Total amount of funding (state and federal) for the Voluntary Prekindergarten program in fiscal year 2010-11.

31: The number of Early Learning Coalitions statewide.

*Figures as of July 2011; source is the Office of Early Learning July Report Card Released on August 31, 2011

OPI Pulse: Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten Program

The Florida House passed House Bill 7085 with a vote of 100-14 on Wednesday, February 29, 2012. The bill will be sent to the Senate for consideration.

Background:

The Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) program is a voluntary, free prekindergarten program offered to eligible four-year-old children in the year before admission to kindergarten. Florida's VPK program was created through voter referendum in 2002 and implemented in 2005. The program focuses on providing early childhood development and education to better prepare children for kindergarten. A child must be a Florida resident and attain four years of age on or before September 1 of the academic year to be eligible for the VPK Program. Parents may choose either a school-year or summer program offered by either a private prekindergarten provider or public school. Funds are distributed to eligible VPK program providers based on the attendance records of children enrolled in the VPK program. The state Office of Early Learning is responsible for administering Florida's Voluntary Prekindergarten program. Previously located within the Agency for Workforce Innovation, the Office is currently established as an independent entity within the Florida Department of Education.

To successfully execute the VPK program, the Office of Early Learning coordinates with local and state entities, each of which are responsible for different aspects of the program. The local delivery of VPK services is coordinated through the state's 31 Early Learning Coalitions. As part of its official duties, the Office of Early Learning is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the performance of each Early Learning Coalition. Each coalition is governed by a local board of directors consisting of members appointed by the Governor (the board chair and two other members), community representatives, as well as public and private stakeholders. Under this structure, the Early Learning Coalitions coordinate the delivery of services among their local child care providers. Each coalition must serve a minimum of 2,000 children; coalitions struggling to meet this minimum threshold may apply for and receive a waiver from the state to remain operational.

At the state level, the Office of Early Learning must coordinate with both the Department of Education (DOE), and the Department of Children and Family Services. The DOE is responsible for adopting the state's kindergarten readiness standards. The DOE also approves VPK program curricula for low performing providers, oversees statewide kindergarten readiness screening, calculates kindergarten readiness rates, adopts minimum standards for VPK director credentials, and determines which Child Development Associate credentials qualify for acceptance as college credit. The Department of Children and Family Services administers the state's child care provider licensing program and posts VPK provider profiles on its website.

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Additional Resources:

Florida Office of Early Learning

<u>Voluntary Prekindergarten</u> <u>program</u>

Early Learning Coalitions

Florida Department of Children and Families

Florida Department of Education

Report: Early Learning
Programs and Related
Delivery Systems

In 2011, at the direction of the Florida Legislature, the State Auditor General conducted a financial and performance audit of the Office of Early Learning's programs and related delivery systems. The audit focused on the governance structure of the state's early learning programs, statewide administration and oversight of the VPK and School Readiness programs, and operations of the Early Learning Coalitions. The Office of the Auditor General released its findings on December 20, 2011, detailing that several control deficiencies at the Office of Early Learning and at the Early Learning Coalitions contributed to ineffective program administration. The audit also disclosed deficiencies in the Early Learning Coalitions' financial management, operations, program administration, and information technology practices, as well as noncompliance with state and federal regulations.

Issues at a Glance:

Proponents of changing the VPK program reference the findings of the state Auditor General as justification for their proposed reforms. The report cited several systemic inefficiencies including:

- Some Early Learning Coalitions did not always ensure that VPK program eligibility and enrollment files were maintained in accordance with the law and Office of Early Learning rules;
- Some Early Learning Coalitions did not always document that parents were informed of their rights and responsibilities or that VPK program provider profiles were made available as required by law;
- Some Early Learning Coalitions did not always maintain documentation demonstrating that, prior to delivering VPK instruction or receiving payment, VPK providers submitted complete and signed Statewide Provider Registration Applications;
- Some Early Learning Coalitions did not always maintain documentation demonstrating that background screenings had been properly performed and reviewed for all VPK instructors;
- Some Early Learning Coalitions did not always maintain documentation demonstrating that VPK instructor requirements, including education and training requirements, had been satisfied;
- Early Learning Coalition payments to VPK providers were not always supported by appropriate documentation; and
- Some Early Learning Coalitions did not utilize comprehensive monitoring schedules to track the results of VPK Program provider monitoring efforts.

What the Bill Does:

House Bill 7085, sponsored by Representative Fresen, the House Education Committee and the K-20 Competitiveness Subcommittee, alters the administration and service delivery of Florida's Voluntary

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Access additional details on <u>HB 7085</u> by visiting the <u>bill</u> <u>page</u> on the <u>House website</u>.

Prekindergarten program by establishing a statewide provider agreement. The bill:

- Requires the Office of Early Learning to adopt, by rule, a statewide provider agreement that must be used by each Early Learning Coalition when contracting with a Voluntary Prekindergarten provider.
- Prohibits an Early Learning Coalition from omitting, supplementing, or amending provisions in the statewide provider agreement or inserting or including attachments, addenda, or exhibits.
- Repeals s. 1002.65, Florida Statutes, dealing with aspirational goals regarding prekindergarten instructor credentials.
- Requires the Auditor General to conduct annual audits of Early Learning Coalitions.
- Requires the Office of Early Learning to monitor and evaluate the performance of each Early Learning Coalition, review each coalition's finances, and evaluate each coalition's operations and program administration.
- Repeals s. 1002.77, Florida Statutes, which establishes the Florida Early Learning Advisory Council.
- Requires that a Voluntary Prekindergarten provider amend its student enrollment count by December 31 for the prior fiscal year.

Frequently Asked Questions

How will the proposed changes impact the administration of the Voluntary Prekindergarten program at the local level?

The bill requires the Office of Early Learning to adopt, by rule, a statewide provider agreement and provides specificity regarding the terms and conditions that must be included in the statewide provider. In addition, VPK providers are required to comply with the requirements of the statewide provider agreement. The bill prohibits Early Learning Coalitions from supplementing or amending the statewide provider agreement.

Does the bill maintain the educational components of the Voluntary Prekindergarten program?

Yes. House Bill 7085 does not alter the educational components of the Voluntary Prekindergarten program.

If the bill passes, when will the changes go into effect?

If the proposed bill passes, the changes will be effective July 1, 2012.

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